

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 19, 2011

The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
18<sup>th</sup> and C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Through enactment of the Wilderness Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and other statutes, Congress has identified wilderness preservation as a fundamental purpose of public land management and required your Department to routinely assess public lands for wilderness characteristics. As Members of Congress who understand the value of preserving wild places, we commend your recent Secretarial Order resuming the Interior Department's compliance with these laws.

The decision by former Secretary Norton to settle litigation in Utah by unilaterally declaring that the Department of the Interior would no longer seek protection for new areas of public land exhibiting wilderness characteristics exceeded the scope of the litigation and abdicated the Department's statutory responsibilities. The Bush Administration's eight-year campaign to subjugate all other uses of public land – recreation, water quality, habitat, ranching – to rampant energy development has been well documented and former Secretary Norton's "No-More-Wilderness" policy is one of the most destructive examples.

Secretarial Order 3310 reverses this dangerously skewed policy and restores balance to public land management. By its own terms, the Order requires compliance with existing law regarding the identification and protection of wilderness quality lands where appropriate. Further, the Order acknowledges that wilderness designations have always been, and remain, the prerogative of the Congress.

Some have asserted that this Order circumvents the Congress and the public when, in fact, the opposite is true. The Order restores appropriate deference to statutory requirements where the Norton policy flouted the law. Similarly, the Order abandons unilateral policy, implemented with no public input, in favor of a public notice and comment process that has successfully guided public land management for decades.

Such criticism is based on a misunderstanding of the Order and a misunderstanding of wilderness. No law requires the federal government to transform unsuitable land into wilderness and that is not what the Order contemplates. Rather, the Order acknowledges Congressional

intent that the Department conduct periodic assessments to determine where wilderness already exists and work to protect wilderness characteristics where appropriate. This has been national policy for more than 40 years, under both Republican and Democratic Administrations, and we applaud your decision to once again work with the Congress to achieve these important goals.

Edward J. Markey  
Edward J. Markey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources

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